

Title: Tower of Air

Topic Area: Problem Solving, Working Together

Concept: Sometimes the decisions we make are not ours alone to make. There might be a group of people involved. You need to know how decisions are made in a group and the dynamics that take place. Our ability to influence a group decision will play a major role in our staying out of trouble since many of our troubles occur in groups and not by ourselves. Students will look at the issue of problem solving while trying to create the tower. They will also have to determine ways to work together since this activity sets up an artificial situation that requires them to do so.

Method: Classroom activity

Time Estimate: 15 minutes plus discussion time

Materials Needed:

10 balloons for each team of three (The balloons can all be the same size of shape or they can be various sizes and shapes)

Masking tape

Yard stick

Activity: Divide your group into teams of three. Give each team ten balloons and 30 inches of masking tape. Explain that the object of this challenge is to build the tallest free standing tower using just the balloons and the masking tape that they have been given. The tower must be built on the floor (or table) and may not use any other objects to lean against or help support it. They will have ten minutes to build their tower.

Variations: I have found it educational to build in certain barriers during the activity. While the activity is underway, I will call out certain instructions that must be followed. For example, "For the next 60 seconds no one in your group may talk" or "For the next 60 seconds everyone in the group may only use one hand".

Discussion Ideas:

"What" Questions

How tall did your tower end up being?

Did you do any planning before you started building?

Did the plan change after you started building? In what way?

Did everyone provide input to the plan?

What happened in your group as time was running out?

Was your end product satisfactory? What would you change next time?

"So What" Questions

Did you look at what other teams were doing to get ideas? Would that be considered cheating? (Mention that this would not be cheating. You did not tell them they couldn't look. It is a good practice to use good ideas no matter where they come from)

What can this activity tell us about working together?

What problems can occur when you work in groups?

Was a leader chosen in your group? Did one emerge? How was your group led?

Describe the roles that each person in your group played.

Were some people in your group more involved than others? Why?

"Now What" Questions

How does working together help us solve problems?

What behaviors should you exhibit when working as a part of a team?

How important is communication with your team members?

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